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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 002494

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON MINISTER FOR LOCAL
GOVERNMENT

REF: DHAKA 2440

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA BUTENIS, Reasons: Para 1.4 (B)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador and LGRD Minister/BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan discussed RAB's recent capture of top terrorist leaders (reftel), prospects for AL/BNP dialogue, and the BNP-JI coalition in the upcoming election. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On April 26, Ambassador made her introductory call on Minister for Local Government, Rural Development, and Cooperatives and Secretary General of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. Polof (notetaker) accompanied Ambassador for the 25 minute meeting.

¶3. (C) Bhuiyan greeted Ambassador, noting that the U.S. is one of the largest investors in Bangladesh and is the largest consumer of Bangladesh goods. He quickly added that there was good news in the war against terrorism, stating that the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) captured the last two of the senior most terrorist leaders of Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB). (reftel) The Ambassador congratulated Bhuiyan for the good news, expressed hope that the BDG would follow through on discovering who supported and financed them, and said the U.S. is ready to assist if asked. Bhuiyan said they are doing their best to identify their financial backers.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern about RAB's extra-judicial killings. Bhuiyan said the situation was temporary as "we needed to take action against the JMB and ultra-leftists." Ambassador stated that firm action could be taken without crossfires within the rule of law. Bhuiyan disagreed. "They were so powerful that people could not even go out of the homes, including foreign diplomats." (Note: We are unaware of any JMB "crossfires.")

¶5. (C) Ambassador asked about the JMB impact on BNP/Jammat Islami (JI) in the next election. Bhuiyan said that JI has the same ideology as JMB but is committed to a democratic process and they are an acceptable coalition partner. As for allegations JI supports JMB, he said, "If it is proved, we will act."

¶6. (C) Asked about the Awami League call for election reforms, Bhuiyan said that after the BNP came to power in 1991, "we did the caretaker government" and "it's more or

less fair." Bhuiyan agreed with ambassador about the positive role of international election observers, and said that "we even send international election observers to other countries."

¶7. (C) When asked about the AL demands for reform, Bhuiyan said the real problem with elections is that corruption increases during an election year because so much money is needed to campaign. Bhuiyan lamented "personalized politics", and said that the BNP has made a number of peace overtures, which were rejected by a "stubborn" Sheikh Hasina.

As for the AL demands, "it's a chance to win over the AL to participate in the elections." If elections were held tomorrow, "it will be tough for us, due to the problems with electricity and the high price of oil and commodities like sugar." He disagreed about the need for reforms, saying that the Election Commissioner "is a good man who speaks frankly," and the ex-Chief Justice, slated to head the caretaker government "has integrity."

¶8. (C) About Jammāt Islāmī's popularity, Bhuiyan said that while JI has "sufficient money from the outside," it does not have a lot of popular support. He said that without the BNP, it might win three to five seats, but with the BNP they will win as many as 20. He added that while there are those inside BNP who say it should not have united with JI, they have a dedicated membership "to make up for our losses." Bhuiyan said that JI members are "good Muslims" but in the last 10 to 15 years madrassahs sponsored by "the Middle East" are now in the remotest villages. He discounted notions, though, that Bangladeshi workers returning from the Middle East bring back extremist views.

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¶9. (C) Comment: Bhuiyan represents the BNP's moderate face and leans forward to urge dialogue and compromise to defuse political tensions with the Awami League. His proposals are sometimes contradicted by more senior colleagues but it is unclear whether he is being genuinely outflanked or playing his assigned role in a public relations cat-and-mouse game. A former Maoist as a student activist, he has no love for Islamists.
CHAMMAS